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The Memory of Architecture, the Architecture of Contentious Memory. Post-Ottoman Edifices of Worship and the Contemporary Spaces of Bulgarian Cities—the Case of Dzhumaya Mosque and the Tomb of Bali Efendi

ABSTRACT

The Ottoman rule in Bulgaria brought a visible change in the way of organizing urban spaces expressed by i.a. architectural elements and public facilities making up new infrastructure which provided for the needs of Muslim culture. A vital element of this infrastructure is objects related to religious worship which the author of the text considers palimpsest-places. In a diachronic view, one can observe for example practice of transforming sacred buildings—churches into mosques and, after regaining independence, mosques into churches, as a result of transitioning of the same territories between Islamic and Eastern Christian cultural spheres. Other Bulgarian locations related to the Islamic culture became multilayer spaces utilized by representatives of various cultural and religious universes at the same time. The author's considerations of the problematic status of these places are illustrated by the cases of Dzhumaya Mosque in Plovdiv and the Tomb of Bali Efendi in Sofia. The study of the meanings inscribed into city iconospheres by the discussed objects shows a huge role of the visual sphere in the creation of appropriated, regained or shared spaces. Therefore the purpose of this article is to consider the status of the post-Ottoman cultural objects in modern Bulgaria and their position on the mental maps of Bulgarian cities. It allows us to compare often extreme social reactions to their presence in the public space which exposes the multilayered ontology of these buildings. The inclusion of the issue of the collective memory of traumatic past into the analysis justifies regarding the discussed locations as transmitters of contentious memories which provoke a discussion on tolerance, nationalism and creation of historical narrative.

KEYWORDS

Dzhumaya Mosque, Tomb of Bali Efendi, Sofia, Plovdiv, the Ottoman Heritage, Post-Ottoman Edifices of Worship, Public Space, Bulgarian Cities, Memory

Introduction—The Usurped Urban Space

Maria Todorova, a scholar of Bulgarian descent and author of the famous work *Imagining the Balkans*, stated that “it is absurd to search for the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans, the Balkans are the Ottoman heritage.”¹ The long period of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, which started in 1389 with the Turkish (probably) victory in the Battle of Kosovo, permanently changed local realities (political, economic, demographic, religious) and visible traces of these influences persist in the Balkan space to this day. During the analysis of the stage in the Bulgarian history, which was the Ottoman rule, Ivo Strahilov and Slavka Karakusheva posed a question, whether “it is at all possible to speak of the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans (especially in Bulgaria), if we assume that the purpose of heritage is ‘to be inherited,’ i.e. to be identified and viewed as a part of the nation’s historic past?”² Such a question is justified in the context of numerous national narratives which portray the period between the 16th and 19th centuries exclusively as a time of denationalization, forced conversion, discrimination and violence, because it shows that the problematic past and its remnants are either marginalized, or they constitute, as Nikolay Aretov puts it, “rejected heritage.”³

It is also worth mentioning that the establishment of Turkish influences in the Balkans negatively affected the perception of the cultures there in Western Europe and gave rise to a number of oversimplifying stereotypes. Many of them were based on a belief about the Oriental character of the Balkan Peninsula, that in turn caused its pejoration and marginalization as an imagined Other.⁴

¹ М. Тодорова, *Османското наследство на Балканите*, [online] <http://www.librev.com/index.php/discussion-bulgaria-publisher/2027-2013-04-19-10-36-54> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

² И. Страхилев, С. Каракушева, *Османското минало – между наследеното и наследството*, [online] https://www.seminar-bg.eu/spisanie-seminar-bg/broy12/item/444-osmanskoto_minalo.html [accessed: 13.08.2019].

³ Н. Аретов, *Балканските народи и Османската империя: Едно отхвърлено наследство*, “Литературна мисъл” 2008, бр. 1, p. 55.

⁴ Larry Wolff writes more extensively about the intellectual process of dividing Europe into mystic East and rational West, whereas Božidar Jezernik shows the impact, that travel diaries about the Balkans written by Westerners had on the mechanisms of stereotypization of this space, in his book *Wild Europe: the Balkans in the gaze of Western travelers*—an exten-

The focal point of the interests of the author of this text is contemporary Bulgarian public space, which contains edifices of worship built during the Ottoman reign. The space of other countries of the Balkan Peninsula was also heavily marked by many years of Ottoman influence through the urban solutions which were used, as well as public facilities and places of worship. It should be noted that often ambivalent social reception of Muslim objects of worship is not exclusive to Bulgaria, but it is a pan-Balkan tendency proven by the fact that

[...] regardless of historical facts, the current conflicts in the Balkans are also caused by the contemporary Balkan Orthodox understanding of a Muslim as a human being of lesser value, a parasite on "our" soil, trash whose fate is not important and who is usually scorned regardless of the official views we declare as European citizens. We only take an interest in them, when they are in our way.⁵

In 1393, forces of the Ottoman Empire led by Bayezid I captured Tarnovo, the then capital of the Tsardom of Tarnovo. Three years later, the fortified city of Vidin, the main center of the Tsardom of Vidin ruled by Ivan Stratsimir, also fell. This defeat marks the beginning of the 500-year Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, situated at the core of territories occupied by the sultan's forces. This problematic position influenced the way of exercising power (both political and cultural) over the conquered Bulgarian lands. The dominant ideology of the Turkish state was based on Islamic rules, while the close relationship of religion and state administration shaped the institutional organization of the Empire itself, as well as that of the occupied territories. It also affected the differentiation of the social structure, mainly through discrimination (economic or in access to civic rights) of the non-Muslim population. As a result of emigration, displacement and conversion, the number of people in Bulgaria officially following various forms of Islam gradually increased. It is worth noting, however, that with the corroboration of the Turkish rule, religious divisions blurred and clear sep-

sive summary of the views on the Balkans collated from numerous travel reports. The relationship between the categories of orientalism and balkanism, which come up in the discourse about the Balkans, was studied by such scholars as Maria Todorova and Milica Bakić-Hayden. See: L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994; B. Jezernik, *Dzika Europa. Bałkany w oczach zachodnich podróżników*, tłum. P. Oczko, Kraków 2013; M. Todorova, *Bałkany wyobrażone*, tłum. P. Szymor, M. Budzińska, Wołowiec 2008; M. Bakić-Hayden, *Reprodukcja orientalizma: primer bivše Jugoslavije*, „Filozofija i društvo” 1998, t. XIV, pp. 101–118.

⁵ I. Sawicka, J. Sujecka, *Wprowadzenie do bałkanologii. Etnosy – Języki – Arealy – Koncepcjonalizacje*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 10–11.

aration gradually transformed into religious syncretism, resulting chiefly from many years of coexistence of Turks and Bulgarians in the same spaces.⁶

The change of power also brought a visual modification of Bulgarian space, which was at the time a Slavo-Byzantine amalgam. Virtually every dimension of urban areas was transformed—fortifications, defensive infrastructure, tsars' palaces and boyars' residences were demolished. Places of worship were also erased from the landscape—many monasteries and churches were burnt, while some of the latter were transformed into mosques, belfries standing out from the city panorama replaced with slender minarets. As a result of these actions, new elements were inscribed into the landscapes of Bulgarian cities, including objects providing for the needs of the Muslim population. Therefore drinking water fountains (*чешми*), clock towers and multifunctional T-shaped buildings appeared, constituting Muslim culture complexes, along with other public facilities, such as religious education centers, public baths or soup kitchens for the poor and travelers (*imarets*).⁷

Just a quick overview of the above-mentioned examples shows a visible transformation of architectural silhouettes of Bulgarian cities. A lot of objects built in the 14th century and later are to this day present in many urban areas there.

Architecture as a way of space planning consists of numerous artifacts which, although not permanently inscribed into city landscape, often take root in it for a long time. When interpreting a city as a cultural institution composed, in the most basic view, of public and private spaces, one must take into account the elements that construct the ontology of each of the components. Moreover, this complex division is superimposed by issues of individual and collective reception of given spaces which is largely a result of mnemonic or associative processes.

The subject of this paper will be two examples of Ottoman sacred architecture, that is Dzhumaya Mosque in Plovdiv and the Tomb of Bali Efendi in Sofia. The core of the author of this text considerations is the social reception of these objects exposing an inseparable bond between memories and locations. The author interprets both cities as palimpsest spaces that are characterized, in addition to their complex structure, by a high degree of memorability.

⁶ Д. Трънкова, А. Георгиев, Х. Матанов, *Пътеводител за османска България*, София 2011, p. 12.

⁷ More information on city planning and architecture of the cities conquered by the Ottoman Empire provided, among others, by Grigor Boykov. See: Г. Бойков, „Османизацията“ на Пловдив (Филибе) през XV в. – население, градоустройство и архитектура, „Годишник на Регионален Исторически Музей – Пловдив“ 2012, pp. 39–67.

An attempt to define a concept such difficult to perceive as the Ottoman heritage must be approached with a number of simplifications. According to Maria Todorova “the danger [of these simplifications] lies not in over-emphasizing ‘the influence of the West’ and belittling the continuity and local institutions, but in an artificial separation of institutions and influences into «local» and ‘Ottoman.’”⁸ Peculiar religious syncretism, whose two variants are exposed by an analysis of the status of two post-Ottoman religious objects, confirms the argument that such divisions are groundless, particularly when one considers the play of meanings between dynamic spaces and heterogeneous communities that are a part of the Bulgarian society.

Spatialized Memories and *Modi Memorandi* of Identity

The aforementioned examples of the Ottoman architecture are still integral parts of Bulgarian cities, inherently grown into their structure. As such they are an important, though often an unnoticeable component of urban space. At the same time, they are not neutral semantically, but they generate certain meanings. The meaning of these objects comes from their functional purpose—they are important places of worship from the point of view of Muslim minorities inhabiting Bulgaria, many of them are also officially categorized as parts of Bulgarian cultural heritage. Dzhumaya Mosque is one of the oldest and largest Muslim sacred buildings in the Balkans and the most important place of worship in the Plovdiv Province. On the other hand, the Tomb of Bali Efendi, situated in the periphery and unremarkable in appearance, is neither a tourist attraction nor a destination of pilgrimages. Over time, the worship of the Tomb of Bali Efendi started to fade. Svetlozar Kirilov, a Bulgarian sociologist and journalist concerned i.a. with the problems of integration of the Roma minority, described it even as “dying.”⁹ Sacred buildings erected in Bulgaria during the Ottoman rule are oftentimes so deeply rooted into the city structure, that they are automatically recognized as its fixed component. Their daily beholders grew accustomed to their presence. Renewed acknowledgment of this kind of objects is often linked to an earlier controversy (e.g. arisen from nationalist or discriminatory narratives) related not to the building itself, but to the meanings or memories it diffuses, because—in the words of Pierre Nora—memory is “susceptible to manipulation and appropriation, it can slumber and reawaken

⁸ М. Тодорова, *Османското наследство...*, op. cit.

⁹ С. Кирилов, *Бали Ефенди – един умиращ култ в полите на Витоша*, [online] <http://www.librev.com/prospects-bulgaria-publisher/2289-2014-01-21-10-39-06> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

every once in a while.”¹⁰ Deyan Sudjic notes that “architecture is about power and rulers build because rulers have always been building. [...] Architecture is, first of all, a means to tell about those who enabled its creation.”¹¹ Ottoman material heritage frequently induces negative emotions or associations to violent domination. It is after all visible evidence of Bulgaria’s former subjugation to the Ottoman Empire. Almost five hundred years of Turkish rule over these lands is still described as a time when Bulgaria was under the yoke¹² and provides a source for martyrological myths. The authors of the book *Пътеводител за османска България*, a guide to Ottoman architectural heritage, ironically state that “the Ottoman Empire is a populist’s favorite excuse to everything wrong in Bulgaria—from bad work ethics to ineffective bureaucracy, from lack of good roads to eating sunflower seeds.”¹³

Dimana Trankova, Antoni Georgiev and Hristo Matanov notice also that Turkish influences present in many aspects of contemporary Bulgarian culture are often marginalized, and the narrative regarding this historical period, propagated i.a. in student’s textbooks, literature and visual arts, oftentimes comes to a conclusion that “the 500 year Ottoman domination in Bulgaria is nothing more than a long streak of decapitation, impalement and rivers of blood.”¹⁴ Such a way of creating a story about a problematic and often traumatic stage of history (the authors of the mentioned work call this narrative practically propagandist) constitutes an expression of constructing a memory of this period. Aforementioned Pierre Nora described such a mechanism of thought as mediated memory, reformulated by history, “conscious and thought through, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous.”¹⁵ A visible heritage of a once officially dominant culture is therefore oftentimes interpreted in Bulgaria as a sign of post-dependence—a result of the intensifying process of domination of history over memory observed by Nora. With this in mind, many secular objects built during the Ottoman reign are defined by the category of

¹⁰ P. Nora, *Między pamięcią i historią: Les lieux de Mémoire*, tłum. P. Mościcki, „Tytuł roboczy: archiwum” 2009, nr 2, p. 5.

¹¹ D. Sudjic, *Kompleks gmachu. Architektura władzy*, tłum. A. Rasmus-Zgorzelska, Warszawa 2015, p. 14.

¹² This phrase is a reference to Ivan Vazov’s novel *Under the Yoke* (*Под узомо*), published in 1894, which tells a story of preparations for the anti-Ottoman uprising which took place in April of 1876. See: I. Wazow, *Pod jarzmem*, tłum. Z. Wolnik-Czajkowska, Warszawa 1974.

¹³ Д. Трънкова, А. Георгиев, Х. Матанов, op. cit., p. 12. Eating sunflower seeds is often viewed as a harmful habit. Doing so during a conversation used to be regarded as bad manners by Muslims.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁵ P. Nora, op. cit., p. 7.

Bulgarian renaissance architecture.¹⁶ Architecture, being an art of shaping and modeling space, has a relatively wide range of iconic power, because it permanently changes not only the visual form of certain areas, but also their symbolic overtone, so, as Sudjic notes, "it has the power to insert the world into a frame."¹⁷

The objects discussed in this paper are a materialization of memory which is inseparable from social perception. As Jan Assmann notes, "memory needs places and is a subject to spatialization."¹⁸ During the analysis of the problematic status of the objects the author of this text discusses, the category of memory figures defined by the German researcher of memorizing mechanisms comes in useful. According to this concept memory is embedded in the concrete, not in the abstract, and "ideas need to acquire a material symbol to become an object of memory."¹⁹ Memory in this sense has a time and space frame and is shaped by things or architecture, because "a tendency to localization is typical to all kinds of communities. Every group that aspires to consolidate as such, tries to create and secure places that would serve as [...] symbols of identity and an attachment point for memory."²⁰ This issue was similarly phrased by aforementioned Pierre Nora, who stated (stressing out even more strongly the inseparable connection between tangible things or objects and evasive and abstract memory) that "modern memory is primarily archival memory. It is entirely based on the materiality of traces, the directness of data, the visibility of the image."²¹ Therefore the concept of sites of memory in the broadest sense refers to all kinds of its visual representations, including architecture.²² While

¹⁶ An example of this is a Facebook fanpage *Architecture of Renaissance Plovdiv* which posts archival pictures of buildings from the time and historical curiosities about them. The authors also take up the issue of preservation of the city's architectural heritage. In January 2019 the fanpage had 1617 followers.

¹⁷ D. Sudjic, op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁸ J. Assmann, *Kultura pamięci*, [in:] *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, red. M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2009, p. 70.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 69.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 70.

²¹ P. Nora, op. cit., p. 7.

²² The issue of sites of memory is so intensively explored that today we can speak of this term's "international career," in the words of Andrzej Szpociński. See: A. Szpociński, *Miejsca pamięci (Lieux de Mémoire)*, „Teksty Drugie” 2008, nr 4, p. 11. Andrzej Szpociński was the first who introduced this term in Polish humanities. See: idem, *Kanon historyczny*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 1983, nr 4 (91), pp. 129–146. In Poland, they used it, interpreting and reconfiguring Norra's original approach, e.g. Roma Sendyka, Jolanta Sujecka, Marcin Kula and Marian Golka. See: R. Sendyka, *Miejsca, które straszą (afekty i nie-miejsca pamięci)*, „Teksty Drugie” 2014, nr 1, pp. 84–102; J. Sujecka, *Балкански места на паметта. Терминът Македония и об-*

considering ontological statuses of the sacred edifices built during the Ottoman reign, not only in Bulgaria but in the whole Balkan Peninsula, special emphasis should be placed on the significance associated with these spaces, as well as on the issue of consolidating the group around the values communicated by these places. They are strongly entangled in the past through the memory passed on by them. This issue is further complicated by the fact that many communities inhabiting contemporary Bulgaria see the discussed locations as areas where the social interests of the representatives of each group are concentrated. This requires to take into consideration the issue of collective memory as well. Its nature is reconstructive, so it stores only what the society is able to recreate from its past. The ideas coming from it have to take a form which is possible to memorize, therefore visual, materialized representations of abstract values play an important role in this process—values such as national martyrdom or the myth of “the Turkish yoke.” The visual culture created by given communities can, therefore, connote certain emotions and diffuse meanings in the same measure as a written or oral tradition.

The analysis of the individuals’ and communities’ microenvironment is in a way forced by the culture of memory since it’s related to searching for an answer to the question about elements which mandatorily deserve memory. It is also one of the constitutional factors of every social community’s identity.²³ The entanglement of architecture in the issues of identity makes the way the society perceives it significantly more complex. According to Sudjic “we know how to classify buildings by the shape of their windows or the decorative detail of their capitals. We see buildings as a result of access to certain materials or skills. We lose confidence when we start to consider a wider, political meaning of buildings—why, and not how, they exist.”²⁴ In a semiological approach, represented e.g. by Umberto Eco, the network of meanings diffused by matter is complex. The Italian philosopher and medievalist noticed that architectural objects may denote their own functions and connote ideology associated with them. With these observations in mind we can assume (although considering the variable social reception of both discussed objects, it is just one of a few possible interpretations) that the sacred buildings mentioned in this paper denote a religious, or in a wider sense, ritual function, and connote experiencing the past, specifically the time of the Ottoman rule and various meanings

разът на Никола Вапцаров в българския и македонския времепространствен континуум, “Литературна мисъл” 2005, бр. 2, pp. 138–154; M. Kula, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej*, Warszawa 2002; M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Warszawa 2009.

²³ J. Assmann, op. cit., p. 60.

²⁴ D. Sudjic, op. cit., p. 24.

related to this period. Each of the discussed locations refers to different values—in the case of Dzhumaya Mosque it can be the meanings associated with the memory of foreign domination, cultural subjugation, symbolic appropriation of public space by an intruder from another culture, while the Tomb of Bali Efendi may connote ideas referring to religious tolerance or coexistence and mutual diffusion of different religious universes. Eco argues that symbolical connotations are no less important to a community than their functional denotations. This statement emphasizes the importance of architecture in the process of shaping a space's atmosphere in the understanding of Gernot Böhme—as all-encompassing emotional forces appropriate to the environment, spread by people, things or objects.²⁵

Dzhumaya Mosque and the Tomb of Bali Efendi. Cultural Stratification of Ottoman Edifices of Worship

The Ottoman Empire in the occupied territories pursued a policy of domination of the invader's culture over the one created and propagated by the conquered people. One of the pillars upon which identity of individuals and communities is founded is religion and the ceremonial related to it, and hence—architecture. The attempts at reinforcing Islamic traditions cultivated by the Ottoman Turks in Bulgaria were visually commemorated in urban spaces and inscribed into cities' images, transforming them forever. The increase of Muslim population exacted providing the cities with new places of worship, especially mosques. During the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, there was a frequent practice to transform existing churches into mosques, which implied the destruction of Bulgarian sacred art, such as mosaics, frescos and icons, due to the Islamic resistance to figure representation of saints.²⁶ After Bulgaria regained independence, intensive works on undoing the effects of these actions have begun. The restoration of their original function to churches transformed into mosques constitutes a visual exclamation of installing a new order, in this case—the regaining of independence and cultural autonomy and moreover, as Maria Todorova also stresses, in the context of fight for liberation it is not only an act of breaking with the past but one of denying it as well.²⁷ Many Muslim sacred objects were erased from city landscapes through demolition, desertion and abandonment

²⁵ G. Böhme, *Filozofia i estetyka przyrody w dobie kryzysu środowiska naturalnego*, tłum. J. Merecki, Warszawa 2002, p. 7.

²⁶ Orthodox churches were converted into mosques, destroyed or left to decay. See: И. Страхилев, С. Каракушева, op. cit.; П. Петров, *Пет века под ятагана и Корана (1396–1878)*, [online] <http://koreanstudies.bg/node/110> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

²⁷ М. Тодорова, *Османското наследство...*, op. cit.

to the forces of nature or transformation into public facilities. Such actions aimed at restoration of the former spatial order evidence that religion plays a role of a medium of social memory, though the mnemonic elements inscribed into it are harder to perceive than those that mark objects or pictures located in the urban area.

In Plovdiv, Bulgarian city second to Sofia in terms of population, the change in dominant ideology was visualized in the organization of the urban space, which is confirmed for example by the division of the city into quarters based on the religion of their residents—Christians occupied the fortified part of the city situated upon three hills, while Muslims lived North-West from them. Plovdiv's Dzhumaya Mosque (also known as Muradie) is one of the oldest and biggest examples of Ottoman sacred architecture in the Balkans. Historians still argue about the exact date it was built. According to one theory the mosque, funded by sultan Murad I, was built shortly after the Ottoman army captured Plovdiv around 1364 and the Slavic name of the city was changed to Turkish Filibe.²⁸ According to many sources, the building was erected in a place formerly occupied by the main city church—the Church of Saint Petka, it is, therefore, an example of overwriting multicultural architectural orders within one space. The practice of transforming churches into mosques frequently had a sense-making overtone, as—in addition to its purely functional aspects—it served the legitimization of new rule and it propagated the new culture (including religion and social worldview) as the dominant ideology.

During the reign of Sultan Murad II the building is said to be demolished and a new object of the same function was founded in its place and it stands in Plovdiv to this day. Grigor Boykov notices, however, that during the works on reinforcing the edifice's foundation conducted from 2006 to 2008, no older architectural layers were uncovered, which allows us to rule out theories about an older church or mosque existing in this place.²⁹ The researcher, quoting sources such as travel diaries, architectural solutions used during the construction of the building and tax registers (specifically records regarding *waqf*—an estate or chattel which according to the Islamic law was given for religious purposes or charity), concludes that the mosque could not have been built earlier than in 1433. The monumental object was erected in the main part of the city, an important fragment of Plovdiv's public space, and it set a new zone in the city—a center of commerce to be used primarily by the Muslim population. Boykov notes that “the founding of Muradie Mosque in Plovdiv marked the core of a Muslim city, where all the economic activity and the social life of

²⁸ Г. Бойков, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

the city was focused.”³⁰ As a result of these actions, Christian settlements were pushed to the periphery, which drastically changed the balance of social powers functioning in Plovdiv’s space.

Dzhumaya Mosque is eclectic in its nature not only because of the meanings attributed to the part of the city it occupies. The outer walls were constructed with a particular building technique called *kletachen gradezh* (клетъчен градеж), where a hewn block of stone is enclosed in a rectangular brick frame. This sort of façade decoration is typical for buildings constructed in the Balkans before the Ottoman invasion and said to originate from Byzantium. This technique had been used before while building i.a. churches, so the builders of the mosque could have been local Christians. Therefore while creating a symbol of foreign cultural domination, familiar aesthetics were used, which in addition to the urban legend claiming that a church existed in this place before, reinforces the overtone of the discussed space as a system of intersecting vectors marking different cultural orientations.³¹ Spreading of this rumor bears signs of pejoration of the symbolic overtone of Dzhumaya Mosque which is attributed with a function of a foreign aggressor, a monumental reminder of the dark ages of Bulgarian culture which the period of the Ottoman rule is considered to be. This kind of narrative is based on a catastrophic view of this period.

The fact that the very nature of Plovdiv’s mosque is polarizing the social moods is evidenced by the protests whose contestational energy focuses around its shell and the space it occupies. On May 2, 2019, around one hundred residents of Plovdiv protested against so-called “gypsyfication” of the country. Among romaphobic demands of the protesters were, for example, ensuring police protection for residents of rural areas who are harassed by the Roma and a ban for the unemployed members of this minority on having more than one child. The protest was of nationwide nature, the participants gathered outside city halls. What is interesting in terms of these considerations is the fact that as information portal trafficnews.bg informs, “police and gendarmerie presence increased in the area of Dzhumaya Mosque as the authorities are concerned that the tension may escalate when the protesters pass the mosque.”³² One year before, another notorious protest took place that

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 52.

³¹ According to Bulgarian media, this interpretation was spread by a 19th century writer, Luben Karavelov. See: Д. Лещева, *Какво остана в Пловдив от Османската епоха?*, [online] <https://trafficnews.bg/istoriya/kakvo-ostana-plovdiv-osmanskata-epoha-112365/> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

³² П. Иванова, *Протест срещу циганизацията на площада, жандармерия пред Джумая джамия*, [online] <https://trafficnews.bg/plovdiv/protest-sreshtu-tsiganizatsiata-plosh-tada-zhandarmeriia-17969/> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

had such a direct connection to this problematic space that it caused a physical interference into the shell of the building. Over five thousand protesters, including residents of Plovdiv, Stara Zagora and Karlovo, as well as football fans, gathered outside the courthouse in Plovdiv after the verdict that gave the institution officially representing Muslims in Bulgaria (Главното мюфтийство на мюсюлманското изповедание в Република България) the right to Kurshum Djamia Mosque in Karlovo as a *waqf* estate. The protesters, holding banners with nationalistic slogans and icons, demanded that the Muslim minority give up all claims to spaces of this kind. The radicalization of moods resulted in them attacking Dzhumaya Mosque with stones, cobbles, bottles and fire-crackers. Both situations show radical reactions to the object's material presence in Plovdiv's public space and its problematic social reception. During the mentioned protests the mosque became a materialization of the Other, alien and harmful to the indigenous culture. Therefore it was treated as a lens converging negative values associated by the nationalistic discourse with minorities inhabiting Bulgaria. This course of action exposes a mechanism of interpreting the urban space in the categories of possession and acquisition, it downright becomes an area of manifestation of symbolic power—the protesting residents of Plovdiv usurped the right to the *waqf* estates as their own, Bulgarian and belonging to the Bulgarians. At the same time, they interpreted the transfer of the locations in question to the institutions uniting Bulgarian Muslims, as a physical and symbolic appropriation of urban areas.

It is worth mentioning, however, that Dzhumaya Mosque, as well as the terrain around it, was used as a space of events which were a part of Plovdiv's Cultural Calendar. In 2019 the city acts as the European Capital of Culture and some of the events planned for this occasion directly involved the discussed object. For example, on May 17–19th, 2019, the area near Dzhumaya Mosque hosted the third edition of the fair “Ethno Kitchen on Wheels” (*Етно кухня на колела*) organized by the foundation “Together” (“Заедно”). The main theme of the event, which included workshops and tasting, was various culinary traditions (not only Turkish but also Russian, Jewish, Armenian and Italian). Representatives of various religions from all the minorities inhabiting the city and its surroundings were invited. The location was not chosen randomly—the organizers stated: “this year, when Plovdiv is the European Capital of Culture, everyone has a common message of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and tolerance between all religions and nations.”³³ The mentioned event is an ex-

³³ *Различни етноси от Пловдив откриват заедно на Джумаята. „Етно кухня на колела“*, [online] <http://www.visitplovdiv.com/bg/events/plovdiv/6621> [accessed: 13.08. 2019].

ample of a different interpretation of Plovdiv's mosque overtone, namely its recognition as a symbol of interculturality and a visible testimony to many years of coexistence of various religions, which corresponds with Plovdiv's watchword as the European Capital of Culture, which is "Together" ("Заедно").

Another post-Ottoman object closely related to religious worship and example of a palimpsest space is the tomb³⁴ where Bali Efendi lies. He was a 16th-century Muslim thinker and teacher, a follower of Sufism, author of religious treatises and a prominent figure of Sofia's religious life at the time. According to numerous legends, he was a philanthropist and a tolerant person respecting both Muslims and then discriminated Christians. After his death a religious complex was built in a place which is today Sofia's Kniazhevo Quarter at the foot of Vitosha, comprising a mosque, baths and the tomb where Bali Efendi was buried. At the time of Bulgarian national revival, the mosque was demolished and upon its ruins, the Church of Saint Elias was founded, the construction of which started in 1888. The tomb was destroyed too. It is worth mentioning that this object (as well as the votive stone with a carved cross, almost illegible today, dedicated to Saint George) was built on *waqf* land. The act of constructing an Orthodox church on land reserved for Muslim sacred edifices adds to the ambiguity of this space and the impression of its entanglement into various, often disputable, as the afore-mentioned protests in Plovdiv prove, cultural universes.

The tomb, which has been reconstructed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, is a small rectangular building comprising the sarcophagus of the saint. For centuries this tomb has been the destination of Turkish, Bulgarian and Romani pilgrims. The latter has preserved the saint's cult in their traditions to the greatest extent and they know him by the name of Ali Baba. Svetlozar Kirilov describes specific rituals related to this cult, conducted by the members of Sofia's Roma minority: "first they passed through the church, they took candles, some of them even bowed before the icons, and then they lit the candles in the tomb."³⁵ This practice implies a peculiar religious syncretism which clearly shows in mixing of religious orders and rituals or artifacts related to them. It is noteworthy that the largest number of religious followers had been coming to the thinker's tomb on Saint Elias' Day which is celebrated in Bulgaria on July 20th. Therefore traditionally this day had been dedicated to the patron saint of the church located in the discussed space. And so, *Ilinden*, as this holiday is called in the Bulgarian Orthodox tradition, is an Orthodox, not a Muslim holiday.

³⁴ In Bulgarian this type of object is referred to with a Turkish loanword *тюмбе*.

³⁵ С. Кирилов, *op. cit.*

The considerations of this object are complemented by the fact that another such object is located in the archaeological reserve of Sboryanovo near the town of Isperih in North-Eastern Bulgaria—the Tomb of Demir Baba, the main saint in the tradition of the Alians, a Muslim minority inhabiting, among others, villages in the Rhodopes and Dobruja. They follow a relatively liberal branch of Shi'a Islam, moreover the Alians advocate for the equality of all religions. As such, they are willing to include various external elements into their beliefs, so their religious traditions can be characterized as syncretic. The authors of the afore-mentioned work *Пътеводител за османска България* point out, as they describe in short the Alian rituals, that many of them oppose the official Islamic doctrine, which prohibits, for example, the cult of tombs. As evidence that many of the Alian religious traditions are borrowed from other religions, the authors cite i.a. the practice of lighting candles on graves.³⁶ This reference confirms the cultural entanglement of locations such as the Tomb of Bali Efendi, the ambiguity of their overtone and the complexity of meanings they connote.

Currently, the cult of the Tomb of Bali Efendi considerably decreased in popularity and it is visited by less and less followers for religious purposes. Some of the tomb's furnishings also evidence the heterogeneity of the rites related to it. Kirilov, for example, mentions a piece of cloth laid on a coffin, a kind of small kilim, with an embroidered representation of Saint Nicholas pictured as more commercialized Santa Claus associated with Christmas advertisements.³⁷ All of the above-mentioned elements form an eclectic overtone of this space in Sofia, which becomes a palimpsest not only through the overwriting of architectural layers, such as building a church in place of a mosque but also through adding to it meanings from various religious and cultural universes. The coexistence of an Orthodox church and a Muslim mosque in one relatively small part of the city makes this location ambiguous, its social reception, however, exemplifies a quite different interpretation of power over space than the afore-mentioned example of Dzhumaya Mosque.³⁸

To complement the considerations above one should mention a special kind of reception of post-Ottoman buildings, specifically those that are currently utilized in a way unrelated to Muslim culture in the narrow sense. An example

³⁶ Д. Трънкова, А. Георгиев, Х. Матанов, op. cit., pp. 33–35.

³⁷ С. Кирилов, op. cit.

³⁸ For more information about the cultural phenomenon of good Muslim and Christian neighborliness (which was the source i.a. of some elements of religious syncretism) see Magdalena Lubańska's article: M. Lubańska, *Pogranicze jako przestrzeń strategicznej koegzystencji grup mieszanym religijnym. O a(nta)gonistycznej tolerancji komşuluku w muzulańsko-chrześcijańskich społecznościach bałkańskich*, „Etnografia Polska” 2017, nr 1–2 (LXI), pp. 21–41.

of this type of object is the Chifte Hamam baths in Plovdiv, constructed in the 16th century and officially referred to as “Starinna,” which can be translated as old/antique/ancient, that has served as the seat of the Center for Contemporary Art since 1922. The authors of the album *Пътеводител за османска България* point out that the object’s name has been changed as to obscure direct associations with the Ottoman heritage. The adjective *старинна* suggests antiquity of the object while its transformation into the seat of a Bulgarian cultural institution is an act of giving it a new function, unrelated to its original purpose. This exposes the problematic overtone of this space which municipal institutions try to neutralize by eliminating its connections to a foreign culture, what is a de facto indication of bulgarianization of the building. It is also manipulation in the memory concentrated around this fragment of the city landscape.

Ending

Marian Golka dedicates a chapter of his book “Social memory and its implants” (“Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty”) to media of memory. The author assumes, like Andrzej Szpociński, that almost any work of culture can act as such, though “a medium becomes active when people notice and use it.”³⁹ Moreover, he points out certain paradox considering memory-inscribed artifacts: “the memory of the past resides [...] in surviving works of culture as if in spite of their obvious fate—despite the fact that they are doomed to physical annihilation. The memory depends on the outcome of the fight between annihilation and salvation.”⁴⁰ Therefore it is justified to interpret the objects related to religious worship discussed in this article as transmitters of narratives about the past, even though they often do not have a sanctioned (for example by a memorial plaque) commemorative function. Such an understanding of memory carried by objects is also a view which puts in the center of attention specific individuals and communities equipped with an active power to create their own mnemonic techniques and form narratives about history inscribed into urban space of everyday use. In this sense, the memory may be placed in architecture and built with the use of architectural instruments.

Such an understanding entitles us to interpret cities as multidimensional spaces that individuals shape perceptually according to their subjective liking and personal conditionalities. The palimpsesticity of the discussed locations and the ambiguity of social reactions to them is largely a result of the variety of ways of remembering the meanings generated by both objects. After the Con-

³⁹ M. Golka, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 69.

gress of Berlin, which officially ended the Turkish reign in the Balkans in 1887, the mainstream narrative about the historical Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria was directed against the Turks and underwent periodic radicalization. One of the most blatant examples of discrimination against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was slogans proclaimed by Todor Zhivkov, who in 1971 became the Chairman of the State Council. One of the opinions propagated by him was the belief about particular backwardness of Muslim population due to conservative Islam they followed. It was widely preached that Turks never lived in Bulgaria, therefore local Muslims are in fact Bulgarians who gave in to the process of Islamization. In order to assimilate them to the rest of the society, an action was conducted, incidentally officially named "The Process of Rebirth," which presented Muslims with an opportunity to choose a new, Slavic name and surname. If they refused, the names were assigned from the top down. The process of compulsory change started in the second half of 1984. The number of Muslims who left Bulgaria after the boarder with Turkey had been reopened, given by Tadeusz Czekalski, uncovers the immensity of repression—370 thousand people of Turkish descent fled over the course of three months.⁴¹ The issue of the Ottoman reign today still polarizes social moods and provides a source for numerous political scandals and vehement discussions.⁴² On the other hand, the memory of the myth about Bali Efendi's tolerance and good neighborliness of Muslims and Christians influenced the social reception of the space where the tomb of the Muslim cleric is located—during the evaluation of the place devoted to him, the traits which he represented (kindness, generosity, openness to others) proved more important than his origins and religion. The above considerations show that the Ottoman architectural heritage in the broad sense participates in the process of creating places which enable the coexistence of different cultural spheres, even though it often contributes to controversial spaces of clashing contentious memories. Symbolic meanings inscribed into areas of coexistence of all members of the Bulgarian society are reconfigured, but not erased, because the past determines the way of perceiving the present and the future, therefore "one should not contrast 'the principle of memory' with «the principle of hope.»"⁴³

Translation from Polish: Janusz Szablewski

⁴¹ T. Czekalski, *Bułgaria*, Warszawa 2010, p. 241.

⁴² Some of them are described by Mila Mineva, who also considers in her article the status of an emotionally charged phrase, commonly used in Bulgaria for the discussed historical period—Turkish Enslavement (*турско робство*). М. Минева, *Колко е важно да бъдеш поробен*, [online] <https://www.seminar-bg.eu/spisanie-seminar-bg/broy7-kiberfolk/item/349-kolko-e-vajno-da-badesh-poroben.html> [accessed: 13.08.2019].

⁴³ J. Assmann, op. cit., p. 58.

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